

# FROM INCEST TO TRAGEDY - PSYCHOANALYTIC READING OF THE TALE, ANGEL LOST, FROM THE BRAZILIAN WRITER ARRIETE VILELA<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

This brief essay is intended to describe the subject of incest and tragedy, associated with femininity. In order to do that, the tale of the Brazilian and Alagoan woman writer, Arriete Vilela, *Lost Angel*, was used to make a concatenation between the literary field, together with the psychoanalytic field. Who is the writer and poet Arriete Vilela? She was born in Alagoas, Brazil, in the city of Marechal Deodoro. Through her work, published in books and journals, she has been acclaimed as a writer who talks about her persona with finesse and simplicity. We owe her much as she inserted the literature from Alagoas to her Caeté children. Of small body and smooth talk, Arriete Vilela surprises us with her strong Northeastern accented language, though she escaped from a minimal territoriality for large spaces of literary representativity that enchants everyone in any of Brazil's corners. The text of this article involves a perspicacity of the researcher to see by the kaleidoscope of psychoanalysis and of literature what margins the tale *Angel Lost*.

**KEYWORDS:** Incest. Tragedy. Feminine. Psychoanalysis.

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This text was translated from Portuguese to English so that it could become known in other regions beyond Brazil. This article involves a researcher's sagacity to look through the lenses of psychoanalysis and literature what run deep in the story *Lost Angel*. Possibly, in just a fraction of seconds, we can be transported into the tragic/incestuous/playful game of a father with his daughter. We are left with a question: what is this story all about?

Arriete Vilela's short story looks upon the life of a female character who recreates her steps alongside the unhappy ways of her father. Stating it differently, the story examines a girl's female desire who ties herself to the paternal desire, thus taking her to several actions and thoughts fed by an elected relationship. The story's matrix centers upon a supposed incest, into a life that, except for the tie between father and daughter, renounced other worldly pleasures, and thus loses all meaning.

In this story, an eleven-years-old young woman goes daily<sup>3</sup> with her unlucky partner to an abandoned house. There, in their secrecy, soulful experiences of a very particular emotional development take place.

The mother, as usual, is an absent character, reason for the disgraces suffered by a father who feels abandoned, burdened by an unspeakable melancholy. The text's very tone demands the reader's complicity, as it shares with such attentive reader a sundering intimacy of a failed duo waiting for a maternal figure who could spare them of the pain through a self-remembering memory, that here could be understood in the sense:

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<sup>3</sup> A subject who shares the fate of another person, the one who shares his or her beloved object.

[...] of dislocating to something else associated by continuity or examining the process as a whole, of a case of repression followed by a substitution for something closer (whether in space or time) (FREUD, 1899, p. 291)<sup>4</sup>

For psychoanalysis, one of the possible explanations for femininity and its difficulties, is bound to what has been known as the Oedipus Complex. The Theban trilogy, known as Oedipus King, Oedipus in Cologne and Antigona, reinvented human attitudes, desires and behaviors through the purification (catharsis) of feelings, giving them the perspective of a destiny that commands, without punishment, the threads of human life and death. Such tragic threads<sup>5</sup> become what is known as fatality, causality and the fulfillment of the god's wishes for commanding humanity, or, going a little further:

The word tragic, converted to an adjective, though it points toward several interpretative possibilities, is always ready to designate fatal destinies of a very well defined character, indicating something that goes beyond normal limits. This is the point where the excessive, the hubris, presents itself in its highest vigor (MELO, 2001, p. 37)<sup>6</sup>

According to the Oedipus Complex the first object for a girl should be her mother, but in this oedipal situation the girl's father becomes her love object, and one hopes that in the normal course of her development she finds a way to abandon the maternal object as her final choice of an object (FREUD, 1933, p. 134). The Brazilian woman's story can be seen as a paradox since the main character places herself both as a seduced toy and seducer, in her father's hands, thus forming an abnormal course of the incestuous relationship desiring chains, still not touched by interdiction, nor by the superego's cut when it acts as the catalyst of moral and ethical costumes that give base to the psychic and social outline of men.

The story's structure in its literary meaning shows, through Moises' thinking, as "a dramatic fraction, the most important and decisive, of a continuity in which past and

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4 [...] de um caso de deslocamento para alguma outra coisa associada por continuidade ou examinando-se o processo como um todo, de um caso de recalcamto acompanhado de substituição por algo próximo (quer seja no espaço ou no tempo) (FREUD, 1899, p. 291).

5 The word tragedy was originally created in Ancient Greece in succession to the lyrical and epic genre, its genesis demarcated in the cult of the god Dionysus, approximately in the fifth century before Christ. This society, holder of this genre of art, used to stage the behavior of the gods and humans, heroes and demigods, on a more than artistic level, was a true social institution.

6 A palavra trágico, convertida em adjetivo, por mais que aponte diversas possibilidades interpretativas, está sempre pronta a designar destinos fatídicos de caráter bem definido, indicando algo que ultrapassa os limites do normal. Este é o ponto onde a desmesura, a hybris, apresenta-se em seu vigor maior (MELO, 2001, p. 37).

future have little or no meaning (...) to an unity that becomes evident due to the internal tension of the narrative plot" (1971, p. 21)<sup>7</sup>.

Lost Angel is a suggestive title, because of the feminine in action. "Angel derives from Latin angelus that means the intermediary being between God and men, a child dressed up in religious processions or a dead child" (LAROUSSE, 1992, p.62)<sup>8</sup>. It reminds us of the story's persona who resembles a character whose psychological matrix has something of divine, celestial, yet lost, tossed aside in the paternal eyes and desired by other men's eyes in her future life.

What she wanted was to know her father's soul, as her life was consumed by such purpose. I cite Vilela<sup>9</sup>:

She didn't go to school, did not have little friends, had never been to a birthday party(...). She knew very little about people, because her knowledge was restricted to one single reality: her father's soul. Whenever he was sad, she tried hard to minimize his pain: she caressed him, spoiled him, guessed his tiniest wishes (1997, p. A10)<sup>10</sup>.

The game of feminine desire is to become the phallus, the unveiled object, however "she finds the signifier of her own desire in the body of the one to whom its demand for love is directed" (LACAN, 1998: 701)<sup>11</sup>. The woman adorned by bodily fetishes destroys any possibility to be seen "raw naked", becoming the adornment of somebody else's desire - a sort of killer<sup>12</sup> or a perpetrator of the unbridled drives of life that keep her as a woman, mythical symbol that gives wings to the stories of suffering creatures.

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7 "uma fração dramática, a mais importante e a decisiva, numa continuidade em que o passado e o futuro possuem significado menor ou nulo [...] a uma unidade evidenciada pela tensão interna da trama narrativa".

8 "Anjo vem do latim angelus que significa o ser intermediário entre Deus e os homens, criança vestida nas procissões ou criança morta" (LAROUSSE, 1992: 62).

9 From this moment on citing the text of Arriete Vilela we will put only the page in which it is unique for all the citations of the short story (page A10). This was extracted from Caderno Gazeta Mulher, from the Gazeta newspaper of Alagoas, in 1997 (see References).

10 Não freqüentava escola, não tinha amiguinhos, nunca fora a uma festinha de aniversário [...] Entendia pouco das pessoas, até porque o seu conhecimento restringia-se a uma única realidade: a alma do pai. Quando o sabia triste, esforçava-se para minimizar-lhe a dor: acariciava-o, mimava-o, adivinhava-lhe a menores vontades. (1997: A10).

11 ela encontra o significante de seu próprio desejo no corpo daquele a quem sua demanda de amor é endereçada" (LACAN, 1998: 701).

12 The meaning of the word Other (in capital letters) says of "the place where psychoanalysis places, in addition to the imaginary concept, what, before and outside the subject, nevertheless determines it." (CHEMAMA, R. Dicionário de Psicanálise. Trad. Franke Sttineri. Porto Alegre: Artes Médicas Sul, 1995: 156, Free translation from Portuguese).

In this tale, the girl resembles the mythical figure of the Greek Persefone, the one who had been kidnapped by Hades, the god of Tartarus, becoming his wife; in her suffering she goes through periods when she goes up to earth and then goes back down to hell. The story's eleven- years old character feeds upon the pain of being the partner of a suffering parent, albeit struggling to lessen such sadness by trying to put herself in the absent mother's place, thus enlarging the complicities between the father and the girl. "Ah, the mother: a splinter in her soul. Gone away when she was still a little baby" (A10)<sup>13</sup>.

In the same text, as we go back to the pointed observations of Arriete's story, the tragedy of incest appears in the discourse made up by the author. In what way? The narrator gives us clues: "in the moments of her father's profound sadness, getting ready with her best little dresses to dance for him, the girl would dispense panties. And danced as an intuitive bird. An angel lost between heaven and hell" (A10)<sup>14</sup>.

Some aspects should be seen, to cite: tragedy as something of a childish sexual play; and the establishment of a fantastic cut of the crushed feminine. For the Viennese there are two German words that speak of the art genus: "Lustspiel, comedy, and Trauerspiel, tragedy" (FREUD, 1925, p. 152). The first one can be literally translated as pleasurable play, and the last as ludicrous play (the focus of this study).

Ludicrous play speaks of something childlike, because even with the tragic surrounding it, playing is a part of it. The girl in the story dances for her father – symbol of her desire – and in these gestures brings about the possibility of recreating primitive games of seduction and eroticism. "A tragic dance of a greater sense, whose permanence happens according to the agility of the father's fingers as he touches her" (A10). The fruit of the dual relationship is of acknowledged taste/known, showing itself through the libidinous causes of incest: the fingers touched her.

Another point is the very masked feminine. The character includes in her childhood the need to be seen by the father and to become his cursed sex partner. In this sense Lacan says: "it is to be the phallus, or yet, the signifier for the other's desideratum, that the woman will reject an essential part of her femininity, namely all her attributes, in the masquerade (1988, p. 203)."She is not just only a girl by herself,

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13 "Ah, a mãe: uma farpa na sua alma. Fora-se quando ela era ainda um bebezinho" (p. A10).

14 "Nos momentos de profunda tristeza do pai, ao vestir-se com o melhor vestidinho para dançar diante dele, a menina dispensava calcinha. E dançava feito ave intuitiva. Anjo perdido entre o céu e o inferno." (p. A10).

she is the provider of the paternal desire, mixed with the subjection of her desiring course that takes shape as a character/agonist of the other that makes her hesitate.

The story proceeds in its natural course, the father dies and she is delivered to her destiny. She becomes the woman of defeated men, like her father. The bereavement then shows up, or yet, reorders her itinerary of the maternal absence with the paternal absence. What was a playful game acquires characteristics of a clear melancholy. According to Freud, we know that in bereavement "the reality test revealed that the object no longer exists, demanding that all libido be removed from the ties to that object" (1925, p. 276). The character suffers the drama of really missing the first objects of her life, the parents, and when cursed by death resorts to its beginning: the feminine in suspension.

Pommier (1987, p. 33) affirms that the feminine brand "covers up the presence of an emptiness that demands its cause, and, under its mark, nothing is identified"<sup>15</sup>. An emptiness that exterminates the existence of femininity, giving new edges to it, new textures born into the skin of adornments "that are unessential and that surround the hole" (Ibid, p.33)<sup>16</sup>. The hole's divination is on the dancing of Arriete's girl, where the body is the depositary of breaks, cracks and ghosts.

In the words of the girl, who is now a thirty-years-old woman, rests the plea for help to the master of her life and death, the father. Dead and buried already, with few friends to give him homage, she begs: "Save me, father, because I only believe in you. You are the only loving being I know (A10)."<sup>17</sup>

The love she knew was the paternal love, in a version that translates its very perverse dialogue. Locating the father's name, the one repeated by the woman in this story, make us to relive "the name that finds its identity, frees the tongue from its incestuous consequence" (POMMIER, 1987, p.129)<sup>18</sup>. Meanwhile, we discover that there is a "pereversion", a linguistic game between perversion and paternal (pere) version, a word that belongs to a Lacanian discourse.

The signifying game of desire and paternal version demonstrates the road that the woman-girl from the story has in her subjective constitution, that is to say that the

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<sup>15</sup> "recobre a presença de um vazio que exige sua causa, e, sob sua máscara, nada é identificado".

<sup>16</sup> "adornos inessenciais que margeiam o furo".

<sup>17</sup> "Salva-me, pai, porque só acredito em ti. És o único ser de amor que conheço" (p. A10).

<sup>18</sup> "o nome que localiza sua identificação, desembaraça a língua de sua consequência incestuosa" (POMMIER, 1987, p. 129).

return of the father in her psychic sphere is also the return of an unveiling (aletheia) that conspires her maneuvers there where it is possible to feel the lascivious and eminent loss of "her first love." The exit happens through the continuity of melancholic acts and from the principle that only through the twist of the tragic, her life, even so, will continue to be the same. So we read:

And then, without further remorse or pain nor hopes, she returns to everyday reality and fragments herself into nostalgia and sadness in the arms of defeated men who will never love her (...) (A10)<sup>19</sup>.

It remains to be said that the tragedy considered in this text is a fact that defies the literary imagination of the author, in which the subject of incest and sexual abuse underlies signs of the horror of us readers. Let us remain for hours with the reveries that make the reader's memorial friction in a relationship of complicity and silencing.

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19 E então, sem mais remorso ou dores, ou esperanças, ela retorna a cotidiana realidade e se vai fragmentando em saudade e tristeza nos braços de homens derrotados que nunca a amarão [...] (p. A10).

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## **DO INCESTO Á TRAGÉDIA - LEITURA PSICANALÍTICA DO CONTO, ANJO PERDIDO, DA ESCRITORA BRASILEIRA ARRIETE VILELA**

### **RESUMO**

Este breve ensaio pretende descrever o tema do incesto e da tragédia, concomitantemente com a feminilidade. Para este expediente, o conto da escritora brasileira e alagoana, Arriete Vilela, *Anjo Perdido*, foi usado para fazer uma concatenação entre o campo literário, juntamente com o campo psicanalítico. Quem é a escritora e poeta Arriete Vilela? Trata-se de uma filha alagoana de Marechal Deodoro. Com suas escrita em jornais e livros publicados consagrou-se como aquela que falava sobre seu “eu lírico” com fineza e simplicidade. Devemos muito a ela pela inserção da literatura de Alagoas aos seus filhos caetés. De corpo pequeno e falar tranquilo, Arriete Vilela espanta-nos com sua linguagem de sotaque firme de nordestina, mas que saiu da territorialidade mínima para espaços maiores de representatividade literária que encante em quaisquer rincões do Brasil. Esse texto foi redigido em inglês com a finalidade de torná-la conhecida em outros locais além-Brasil. O tecido/texto deste artigo envolve uma perspicácia do pesquisador em ver pelo caleidoscópio da psicanálise e da literatura o que margeia o conto *Anjo Perdido*.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Incesto. Tragédia. Feminino. Psicanálise.

## **DE LA TRAGÉDIE INCEST - LECTURE PSYCHANALYTIQUE CONTE, ANGE PERDU, LE BRÉSILIEN ARRIETE VILELA ÉCRIVAIN**

### **RÉSUMÉ**

Ce bref essai est de décrire le thème de l'inceste et la tragédie, en même temps que la féminité. Pour cet appareil, l'histoire du Brésil et Alagoas écrivain Arriete Vilela, Ange perdu, a été utilisé pour faire une concaténation entre le champ littéraire, ainsi que le champ psychanalytique. Qui est l'écrivain et poète Arriete Vilela? Il est une fille de Alagoas Marechal Deodoro. Avec leur écriture publié dans les journaux et les livres a été acclamé comme celui qui a parlé de son "lyrique" avec finesse et simplicité. Nous sommes redevables à elle pour l'insertion de la littérature Alagoas à leurs enfants Caetés. Petit corps, et parler calme Arriete Vilela nous émerveille avec son fort accent du Nord et la langue, mais a laissé le minimum pour les espaces territorialité plus importants de la représentation littéraire qui envoûte dans tous les coins du Brésil. Ce texte a été écrit en anglais afin de le faire connaître ailleurs au-delà du Brésil. Le tissu / texte de cet article implique un chercheur à l'idée de voir le kaléidoscope de la psychanalyse et de la littérature qui borde l'histoire Ange Perdu.

**MOTS-CLÉS:** L'inceste. La tragédie. Femelle. La psychanalyse.

Recebido em: 12-07-2017

Aprovado em: 25-11-2017

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